

Conservation groups have not approved ML&P plans for Honolua

Viewpoint

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David Cole is absolutely right in his assessment that Honolua Bay is “an area of profound environmental and cultural significance” (Viewpoint, April 15). However, we beg to differ with a number of his other assertions.

We were more than a little surprised to see the organizations we represent – Surfrider, Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and Project S.E.A.-Link – characterized as tacitly endorsing Maui Land & Pine's long-range plans for Honolua Bay.

His statement, “These long-range plans resulted from 18 months of consulting with Hawaiian leaders . . . community organizations such as Surfrider Foundation, Project Sea Link, Hawai'i Wildlife Fund, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, Local Action Strategy and others,” could easily be perceived that these organizations were involved from the beginning in every stage of the planning and have given blanket approval to all components of the proposed plan.

This is a significant misrepresentation, and we feel compelled to clarify our organizations' roles concerning Honolua Bay.

For years, all three of our organizations have strenuously advocated a positive and productive dialogue involving community stakeholders who care about the future of Honolua Bay.

In late 2005, Project S.E.A.-Link initiated an online discussion on its community forum, and many people expressed very strong opinions about the bay. Project S.E.A.-Link took the opportunity to invite ML&P to join the discussion and suggested it was a good time to begin a more open community dialogue. The response was that the company preferred to wait until it had evaluated the area further and had a defined communication piece to explain what was being considered.

Last year, ML&P began sharing the draft conceptual plans by convening small focus group-type meetings. We felt that these meetings were a good first step in informing the community, and representatives of Project S.E.A.-Link and Hawai'i Wildlife Fund along with a few marine tourism professionals attended a meeting in October 2006. Some of the plans were presented to us so we could listen and learn; we were not explicitly asked for approval. And, in fact, we advised ML&P to take this presentation to the greater community immediately.

Surfrider convened a meeting last summer so that its west side members could review the ML&P surf park proposal. Of 13 West Maui Surfrider members in attendance, none voiced opposition to the surf park. However, the board has not reviewed the plans. For the record, Surfrider has not endorsed any portion of ML&P's plan, and has expressed concern that a golf course adjacent to the ocean would degrade the quality of the near-shore waters, in opposition to

its mission statement.

Project S.E.A.-Link – funded by the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Hawaii Tourism Authority – has focused mainly on recreational impacts to the reef, and on promoting community stewardship efforts through a Makai Watch Program. As a result of these direct efforts, Project S.E.A.-Link has been able to make general suggestions to ML&P representatives that pertain to the shoreline area of the bay itself and its recreational use.

Hawai'i Wildlife Fund has been involved in community-based management at the Ahihi Kina'u Natural Area Reserve and Keoneo'i'o for the last 10 years, establishing Maui's first Makai Watch Program there. Our experience taught us that it is essential to involve the greater community when one of our marine-managed areas is exposed to increasing human impact.

Hawai'i Wildlife Fund has also assisted Project S.E.A.-Link in the creation of Makai Watch at Honolua Bay.

Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and Project S.E.A.-Link recommended the formation of an advisory group for Honolua Bay much like the one established for the Ahihi Kina'u Natural Area Reserve.

Hawai'i Wildlife Fund is not an advocate of anything happening around Honolua Bay except a Makai Watch Program, determination of carrying capacity, restoration of adequate stream flows to promote healthy ecosystems, an understanding of why the coral reef in the bay is dying and immediate remediation. A closure of the bay – even a temporary one – to most human usage and immediate assessment of all activities upstream may be necessary and should be on the table.

Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and Project S.E.A.-Link have participated in informational meetings conducted by the Save Honolua Bay Coalition. This grass-roots group was formed as a direct result of folks feeling like they were excluded from the determination of the future of a very precious place.

It is clear that there are many stakeholders who care about Honolua Bay's future. We hope the dialogue can stay focused on the larger goal of recovering the health of Honolua Bay, and not degenerate into negative approaches that could hurt the process that ought to have been started years ago.

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